

Podcast Episode 4 - Visiting London Transcript

[00:00:00]Intro: Welcome to the UK travel planning podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK travel planning website [Tracy Collins](#). In this podcast, Tracy shares destination, travel tips and itinerary ideas as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation.[00:00:24]

Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages from historic castles to beautiful islands and from the picturesque countryside, it's a seaside towns.

[00:00:41] Tracy Collins: Hello, and welcome to the podcast. This week we're going to be talking about essential tips to plan your perfect trip to London. London is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, and certainly the number one destination for visitors to the UK. If this is your first time visiting London, it can feel quite overwhelming when it comes to **[00:01:00]** planning your visit. **[00:01:01]**

You may be wondering, when is the best time of your visit? How many days to spend in London? How to plan your itinerary to include the sites, attractions and landmarks on your bucket list? Where to stay in London and what to budget for your trip?

These are the myriad of other questions can make planning your visit seem complex and just too hard. After not only living in London, but also visiting the city as a tourist, many times, in this podcast, you will hear my practical travel tips to help you plan your London trip to reduce stress and overwhelm.

Step one is to decide when to visit London and for how long. London is a world-class destination at any time of year and deciding when is best to visit will really depend on what you want from your trip**[00:01:47]** what you want to do, what weather you prefer, and if there are any events you particularly want to see.

If you prefer warm weather and longer days, then the summer months of June to August are generally the best though this is also the busiest and most expensive [00:02:00] time of year to visit. Popular summer London events such as a Chelsea Flower Show, the Trooping of the Colour and Wimbledon also lead to an influx of visitors. [00:02:08]

London is generally at its wettest and coldest from December to February when snow can sometimes fall in the capitol, but don't count on it. London in December is also always busy. And if you like me, can't resist the beautiful Christmas lights, markets and shops.

Keep in mind that the weekends before and after the holidays are the worst. [00:02:27] Thousands of visitors throng the streets and can fill the underground stations. If you panic in crowds or in confined spaces (as I do) I recommend really avoiding underground around this time, particularly around Oxford Street, Piccadilly Circus, and Covent Garden.

If you prefer to visit London in winter but want to avoid the busy season, you will find January and February is quieter. [00:02:48] And as it is low season prices are lower too but do bear in mind that hours of daylight are shorter. Weekends, public holidays and school holidays can also be [00:03:00] busy in London, especially around popular shopping areas, such as Oxford Street and Covent garden.

Museums and art galleries can also be more crowded than usual during public holidays. [00:03:09] or as we call them in the UK - Bank Holidays are December 25th and 26, January the first, Good Friday and Easter Monday, the first and last Mondays in May, the last Monday in August.

This year there is an extra-long bank holiday starting on Thursday, the 2nd of June until Sunday, the 5th of June, which is to celebrate the Queens Platinum Jubilee.[00:03:31] and there are lots and lots of events planned across the country over those four days.

If you're wondering how long to stay in London. I would say that even one day is better than nothing. And two is obviously an improvement on that. If possible though three days is ideal. As you can see the key sites without rushing around so much that your head starts to spin. [00:03:51]

Step two is to book accommodation. My tip is to [stay in central London](#) while it may be tempting to book cheaper [00:04:00] accommodation further out of the capital I would really advise against this for a number of reasons. London is tiring and after a long day site say in the last thing, you'll feel like, believe me is travelling to your accommodation. [00:04:12]

Staying in a central location means that you can get everywhere far faster, even on foot. This cuts down travel time, immensely, and also saves on travel costs. So you'll spend less money on transport, meaning that you can put a little extra towards your accommodation. I'm often asked about the best areas to stay in London. [00:04:30]

And we've actually just booked our accommodation for July this year, and we are staying in the Covent Garden area. We recommend to stay around the West End, Leicester Square, Covent Garden. You could also stay close to Westminster or on the other side of the river Thames near South Bank, Waterloo and Bankside. [00:04:48] These are all central locations with most of London's top sites within walking distance and convenient access to the Tube.

Step three is to plan your itinerary carefully. [00:05:00] It is easy to over plan and overestimate how much you can do. It can also be exhausting. Having fun is surely the main point of taking a vacation or going travelling. [00:05:09] So don't try to do so much that fits in at all in will cause you stress. I would recommend identifying a few must sees and must do's when you're planning your travels to London and developing your itinerary around those.

We are planning our own visit to London for later in the year I know how easy it is to try and squeeze more and more things into an already busy itinerary. [00:05:30] When putting together your itinerary try to group your destinations, it makes complete sense to visit a bunch of attractions in one day that are clustered fairly close together, rather than being spread out all over London.

Doing this saves on travel time and ticket costs. It also means you can focus on only certain parts of the city each day, helping to prevent you from feeling overwhelmed. [00:05:51] An example of this would be to

combine your visit to the London Eye, the South Bank, Borough market, which are clustered close together. Once [00:06:00] you have your itinerary planned, I recommend that you book your tickets and tours in advance, especially if you're visiting during peak times. It can be difficult to purchase tickets on the day for many London attractions, such as the London Eye, for example. [00:06:15]

By doing a little forward planing before you leave home, you can save both time and money. Doing this also gets you ready for your trip, building up anticipation about the places you're about to see. I've actually just spent the last couple of nights booking most of our tours in London for this July [00:06:32] and I advise that people do book in advance as much as possible because it is expected to be particularly busy this summer. I'd also recommend purchasing or considering whether a London sightseeing pass is worth it for you or certainly to save you time and money.

One of the most popular is the London Pass, which includes free entrance to 80 attractions in London, including the [Tower of London](#), London Zoo, the view from the Shard and many more. [00:06:58] Plus the one day hop on, hop off [00:07:00] bus tour as well as discounts on shopping, dining and entertainment. It comes with priority entrance attractions so you can skip the queue and avoid wasting precious holiday. Which pass you purchase will depend on what you're planning to see and do.

The [London Pass](#) is a great option. [00:07:14] if you plan to see two or three of the attractions every day, but it may be a case of calculating the cost of entry to each attraction versus the cost of a pass to decide if it's worthwhile for you. Another pass available in the London Explorer Pass, where you can create your own tour of London with a pass to 3, 4, 5, or seven top attractions. [00:07:34] Also, don't forget to include some of [London's free attractions](#) and sights in your itinerary.

A visit to London is not cheap so it's good to know that there are lots of [free things to do there](#). Many museums and galleries are free of charge for visitors, the British Museum, Tate Modern, Natural History Museum. [00:07:52] are free for example, and very popular with visitors.

Do plan ahead, though, if there is a particular exhibition that you would [00:08:00] like to attend, because you will have to pay for those. We have just recently booked tickets for the Stonehenge exhibition that's on in the British Museum this year, which looks absolutely fantastic. [00:08:09] But again, make sure that you book ahead for those.

The [Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace](#) is another popular and free attraction that should not be missed off your itinerary. Enjoy a stroll around one of London's many parks in summer head to Primrose Hill with a picnic for great views across the city. [00:08:25] There are also lots of markets to visit, including Borough market Camden market and Portabello Market.

The Sky Garden London's highest public garden is another popular free attraction in London, though, you will need to book a ticket to ensure entry. Bookings open three weeks before. So set a reminder on your phone or mark the date on your calendar [00:08:44] so you don't forget. Step four when planning a London trip is to consider how you're going to get around London. We recommend using public transport including the London Underground called the Tube.

I would not recommend [hiring a car](#) and driving in central London. I speak [00:09:00] from experience with this as I was required to drive in central London when I worked there and it was a stressful experience. [00:09:07] It is far easier to use the [public transport system](#), the Tube overground trains, buses, trams, and light railway. While the tube is the quickest and easiest way to travel around the city don't use it all the time as you won't see much of London, if you spend your entire time travelling underground.

Also check distances between tube stations, as it's often easier and quicker to walk. Covent Garden and Leicester Square are a perfect example of this as they're actually located a little over 400 meters away from each other. [00:09:37] I do recommend booking a [hop on, hop off bus tour](#) or jumping on one of London's famous red double decker buses to see the main sites as it's a great way to orientate yourself with the city.

One of the top sightseeing bus routes to take is route 24 from Pimlico to Hampstead Heath. Catch the bus from Victoria station. [00:09:59] It

[00:10:00] It passes some of the famous sites, including Westminster Cathedral, Downing Street, [Trafalgar Square](#) before continuing on to Camden town and Hampstead Heath. Keep in mind that peak times of day to travel in London are 6:30 to 9:30 AM and 4 to 6:00 PM. Monday to Friday, when people are commuting in and out of London for work. It is cheaper to avoid these times on public transport and travel during off peak for better prices. [00:10:29]

We also recommend that you purchase an Oyster card for use on public transport. An Oyster card is an electronic card that is preloaded with credit, and it's used to pay for public transport in London, including the tube, overground, trams, buses and boats. An Oyster card is a cheaper option than buying single use tickets. Visitor Oyster cards are available if [00:10:51] you're visiting London from overseas and the cards can save up to 50% of regular fares, they're accepted everywhere and it will save you [00:11:00] time on arrival in London.

So if you're planning to travel around London, which I'm guessing you're going to be, make sure you order your visitor oyster card before you arrive in the country, as you won't be able to buy it in London. [00:11:12] So once you've got your Oyster card one of the most common questions we are asked is actually, how do you use it? So do you use those to card? You just literally tap on the yellow card reader when you enter the station and tap off again, when you exit.

There's actually a maximum daily amount that you can be charged. [00:11:27] Alternatively, you can also use a contactless credit card and tap on and off as you enter and leave tube stations, but do consider any bank charges you may occur if you're visiting from overseas.

If you need to top up your card during your trip, you can do it at a station or in over 4,000 shops around London. [00:11:47] If you have money left on your card before you leave London, you also can get a refund if it's over 10 pounds or just keep the card for your next visit, because you will be! When you use an Oyster card on London bus it is slightly different [00:12:00] Swipe the yellow card reader as you get on the bus, but you don't swipe it again [00:12:04] as you get off. You can't buy tickets using cash for buses in London. So you will need an Oyster card or a contactless credit card if you plan to take a bus.

If cycling is your thing, it is possible to hire a Santander bicycle. You will see Santander bicycle docks all around the city. These were introduced by the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson when he was mayor of London back to charge at two pounds for the first 30 minutes.[00:12:28] But you will need to use the Santander bike app to enter your credit card details to rent one.

Another great way to experience London is to take a [river cruise](#). I recommend jumping on a riverboat service run by Thames clipper to Greenwich from Westminster for example. Oyster cards are valid for use on the Clippers too[00:12:45] so no need to worry about buying a ticket alternative. There are lots of fantastic boat trips and cruises along the Thames that you can choose.

Another way to get around is to catch a London cab. London cabs are synonymous with the capital and taking even a quick [00:13:00] trip in a black cab is worth it, even just once [00:13:02] just for the experience. London cab drivers are known for being chatty and who knows what subject might come up as you're driving from A to B. To be a London cab driver, they will have passed a test called The Knowledge and to do this, they must prove they know the location of every street in the Capitol [00:13:20] as well as the fastest route to it. That's a level of expertise you are paying for.

Look for a taxi driver with its light on which shows it's available. Stick out your hand to hail it. And the driver will pull over when they deem it safe to do. Ask them about celebrities they've driven with! That can often lead to lots of interesting stories or is there is always the British fail safe of talking about the weather! [00:13:46]

Step Five when planning your London trip is to consider where and what to eat in London? Hmm. So my tip for this is to visit markets and supermarkets for budget lunches and picnic. Although the [00:14:00] UK may not be famous for its cuisine. London really is a fabulous destination for foodies. I would recommend something, some traditional English food. [00:14:09]

And while this list isn't exhaustive here are some dishes that I recommend that you try - number one is afternoon tea. There's lots of

fantastic afternoon teas available in London from a classic Ritz afternoon tea to themed afternoon teas, including one on a red London bus.

Try some fish and chips, some narrows with Yorkshire Pudding, pie and mash, strawberries and cream (a Wimbledon classic) , an English pint of beer and a traditional English pub with a bag of pork scratchings and a full English breakfast or fry up. [00:14:42]

For those of you who are more adventurous, maybe try something like jellied eels. To save money, eat a popular budget restaurant chains, such as Nando's Wagamamas, Pizza Express and Cafe Rouge. If you're simply looking for sandwich, supermarket chains, such as Tesco Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencers [00:15:00] and Waitrose offer meal deals, this consists of a sandwich, a snacks such as a packet of crisps and a drink at a reasonable cost. [00:15:07]

Borough Market is London's most famous food and drink market and offers diners wide choice of restaurants, pubs, bars, and cafes. So make sure to add a visit to Borough Market into your itinerary. Step six is to consider adding a day trip from London into itinerary. Please don't stay in London for your entire trip. [00:15:29] There are many great destinations within easy reach of the capital by train.

And if you're nervous about travelling independently, there are lots of tours available, which combined two or three of the most popular destinations, such as Windsor, [the Cotswolds](#) and Bath into a day trip. [Popular day trips](#) to the Southeast and Southwest of London include [Bath](#), [Oxford](#), Stonehenge, and Blenheim Palace. [00:15:50] There also some [fabulous castles near London](#), such as Hever Castle, the childhood home of Anne Boleyn, which is an easy day trip.

If you really feel [00:16:00] adventurous, why not book the Eurostar to Paris? It will be a full day and very busy, but it is doable. I know this because my husband once met me in Paris for coffee via the Eurostar. [00:16:11]

Finally, I'd like to share some tips for first-time visitors to London. So, first of all, be careful with your belongings in London. Unfortunately, there are pickpockets around, so I would recommend using a [pickpocket-proof](#)

[bag](#) or backpack when you travel. I have a selection of bags from Pacsafe and Travelon including cross-body bags and day packs, which I always use when travelling in big cities, anywhere in the world.

[00:16:36]

Pay attention when withdrawing money from ATM's cashpoints. Card skimming is a problem, particularly around popular tourist destinations, such as Oxford Street. If anything looks suspicious, do not use the machine. If possible, only use machines in banks.

Tipping, I constantly get asked questions about tipping. [00:16:56]

Tipping is not expected in the UK. Leave [00:17:00] 10% for good service, but do check your bill in case of service charge of 10 or 12% has already been. If you take a London taxi, round up the fare to the nearest pound.

Vehicles drive on the left in the UK. Pay attention when you cross the road, because if you used to drive it on the right, you will look the wrong way. [00:17:20] Always cross at traffic lights, and don't jaywalk, London roads are busy and you need to concentrate when crossing them.

It can be very hot on the underground any time of year in [winter](#) shops can also be stifling are recommend wearing layers that you can cool off if necessary and carry a bottle of water to stay hydrated. [00:17:43] And lastly, visiting London always involves lots of walking. So ensure you wear comfortable footwear.

So there you have it. These are my six steps to planning your first visit to London. Plus some practical tips and considerations. You will find links to [00:18:00] everything mentioned in today's podcast in the show notes [@uktravelplanning.com](#) forward slash episode four visiting London as well as more resources and inspiration for planning your UK vacation.

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planning. That's all for this episode until next time Happy UK Travel Planning.